CTE Research Network
Practitioner Training Modules

How to Communicate About Your CTE Program Using Research
Training Module Series #6
CTE Research Network

Mission

To expand the evidence base on the impact of career and technical education (CTE) programs on student outcomes by:

- Increasing the number of CTE impact studies performed
- Strengthening field capacity to conduct and use rigorous CTE research

The work of the Network member projects is supported by the Institute. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not represent the views of the Institute or the U.S. Department of Education.
Practitioner Training Modules

This series of six modules is designed to support CTE educators in learning more about data and research.

1. Understanding CTE data and why it matters
2. Using data and research to improve CTE programs
3. CTE program evaluation: Why it matters to practitioners
4. Using state data to partner with researchers
5. Using research to design your CTE program for equity
6. How to communicate about your CTE program using research

Module Contents

- Defining Key Terminology
- Crafting a Communications Strategy
  - Why publicize research?
  - Messaging considerations
- Audiences and Messaging
  - Tailoring your communications
  - **Activity:** Sharing research
- Communication Tips and Tools
  - Tools, tips and techniques
  - **Activity:** Audience self-reflection
- Closing Reflection and Resources

https://pixabay.com/photos/checklist-list-ticked-off-hook-2945401/
Objectives

- Learn how to communicate your CTE program’s value and research findings to different audiences and stakeholders.
- Understand real-world examples of types of communication.

Module Instructions

This module includes processes, activities, and tools you can use to drive change at your site.

Before you begin, we recommend downloading and printing the activity worksheets to help contextualize the module content.
Activity 1: Opening Self-Reflection

Think about what you might wish to share about the CTE program(s) at your site.

- Answer the questions included in the Self-Reflection Activity worksheet provided.
- Restart the module when you have completed the worksheet.

Defining Key Terminology
Data Visualization

The graphical representation of complex data using a simple, easily understandable chart or graphic to communicate a specific finding.
Infographic

Combines data visualizations with additional information, such as text, icons, and/or illustrations, to tell a compelling, visually appealing story.

Data stories are nonstatic infographics. They combine photos with graphics and text in a way that allows users to peruse a document at their own pace.

https://www2.ed.gov/datastory/cte/index.html#data-story-title
Crafting a Communications Strategy
Why Communicate Research Findings?

- Reassure stakeholders that CTE programming is of high quality.
- Increase student enrollment and expand program offerings.
- Raise additional funding and resources in support of CTE.
- Build field knowledge and inform future policy.

Source: Lammert, Heinemeier, & Fiore, 2017, from https://osepideasthatwork.org/effectively-communicating-evaluation-findings
Types of Data: Module 2 Review

- **Process indicators**
  - Track implementation activities
  - Provide formative feedback

- **Interim outcomes**
  - Assess early successes
  - May be related to your longer term goal

- **Mid- and long-term outcomes**
  - Used to assess your overall goal
  - Often may take years to achieve
Types of Research: Module 3 Review

- **Process Evaluation**: Examination of implementation efforts to assess whether an intervention is operating as intended.
- **Outcome Evaluation**: Analysis of the results associated with an intervention without attributing a cause-and-effect relationship.
- **Impact Evaluation**: Analysis of the results associated with an intervention that allows for a causal link to be made between actions and results.
Change in Mindset

Who is my intended audience?
How do I share my central message?
Why does it matter?

https://images.all4ed.org/close-up-of-female-kindergarten-teacher
Audiences and Messaging
Audiences

- Individuals directly connected:
  - Participants and their families
  - Site administrators and teachers
  - Participating employers or community groups
  - Funders

- Individuals indirectly connected:
  - Local and state policymakers
  - Other high school and postsecondary educators
  - Local business owners and community members
  - Media

Connect Your Message to Your Goal

Below are some tailored objectives for messages to various stakeholders:

- **Local and state policymakers**: to raise awareness of the value of CTE programs
- **Students and parents**: to see CTE as a strong path for college and career readiness
- **Teachers and administrators**: to raise awareness and to build buy-in for expanding and enhancing CTE programs
- **Local businesses**: to understand the importance of linking employers to schools and local youth

Activity 2: Desired Impact Self-Reflection

What might people want to know about your CTE outcomes and why?

- Answer the questions included in the Self-Reflection Activity Worksheet provided.
- Restart the module when you have completed the worksheet.

Communication Tips and Tools
Communicate To Engage Your Audience

Engaging your audience by:

- Emphasizing that results are about people.
- Highlighting key takeaways in your message.
- Sharing data visually using multiple formats.
- Providing content tailored to engage audience interests.

Data Visualization

- Describes a discrete result.
- Aggregates multiple data points.
- Communicates a specific finding.
- Shares large amounts of data in easy to understand visuals.

Number of Undergraduate Credentials Awarded, by Credential Level and Broad Curriculum Area: 2003 to 2015

https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/ctes/figures/fig_2018010-2.asp
Infographics

- Often provide at-a-glance looks at research studies.
- Pull out key findings and takeaways to share data in a visually appealing and easy to understand manner.
- Can share multiple data elements to communicate complex information in an understandable manner.

## Making Research Understandable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researchers like…</th>
<th>Nontechnical stakeholders like…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Descriptions of study methodology and statistical analyses</td>
<td>Clearly stated findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Precise academic language and abbreviations</td>
<td>Nontechnical language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature reviews to ground the existing study on past work</td>
<td>An explanation of why the work is important for their use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations to guide future research</td>
<td>Recommendations to support implementation or potential changes and improvements</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Change in Mindset

Shifting from a research to communication mindset entails changing how you message…

- Be clear and concise
  - Simpler is better
- Focus on what matters
  - Emphasize results over methods
- Say what you mean
  - Write to avoid misinterpretation

Communication Example: National

Interactive Data Story

Eight years after their expected graduation date, students who focused on career and technical education (CTE) courses while in high school had higher median annual earnings than students who did not focus on CTE.

https://www2.ed.gov/datastory/cte/index.html#data-story-title
To improve the public’s perception of CTE programming, we must fundamentally change how we communicate information, using professional marketing tools and messaging directed at changing people’s minds.

- Missouri Career and Technical Education Advisory Council’s Marketing Taskforce
Data Visualization: District

Figure 1: NYC Students’ Interest in Career and Technical Education Programs, 2008-2017

Figure 2: CTE Programs in NYC, by Career Theme, 2009 and 2018

Infographic: Nebraska

To message that CTE prepares students for college and careers, Nebraska developed a scrolling infographic detailing CTE students’ rates of:

- Participation and concentration in CTE
- High school academic performance and graduation
- Higher education and employment outcomes

Video Infographic: District

Telling a story example:

- Clare-Gladwin Regional Education Services District in Michigan offers CTE to high school juniors and seniors in five area school districts.
- Print and video success stories feature current and former students and instructors.
- Stories include high-level, relevant data.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dw1CraKMy70&feature=youtu.be
Closing Reflection and Resources
Activity 3: Closing Self-Reflection

How might you seek to communicate information to a selected audience?

- Complete the exercise on Self-Reflection Activity Worksheet 3.
- Restart the module when you have completed the worksheet.

References and Resources


References and Resources (continued)


Contact Information

CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION RESEARCH NETWORK

American Institutes for Research
1400 Crystal Drive, 10th Floor
Arlington, VA 22202-3239

CTEResearchNetwork@air.org
Website: https://cteresearchnetwork.org/